American Cyanamid Co. has spent more than $100 million at Fortier to produce acrylonitrile, above, liquid base for acrylic fiber. Right, one of the plant's chemical purification columns.

American Cyanamid --

West Bank Giant

By Gil Webre

"Hurry, hurry, hurry! Step right up, folks, and see the wonders of nature unfold before your very eyes..."

"See air and gas turned into carpets. See air and gas turned into suits and dresses. See air and gas turned into all kinds of goodies..."

Thus might a sideshow pitchman hawk the wares of American Cyanamid Company's petrochemical plant at Fortier, La. And to take license with a phrase, he's not pulling acrylic fiber over your eyes. Every day, manufacturing miracles occur at Fortier, a giant of a plant in Jefferson Parish on the West Bank of the Mississippi River opposite Kenner. Drive by in the daytime and you're taken by the plant's size. You see tall reaction towers, where chemical processes occur; and miles of pipe, which carry the product from process to process and then to storage tanks.

But go at night and the 700-acre plant site resembles a forest of decorated Christmas trees. Reaction towers are bathed in light. Colorful flares burn off waste gases atop scores of stacks.

Even then, you're unlikely to realize

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